



2023
NASPA
SYMPOSIUM ON
MILITARY-CONNECTED
STUDENTS

Correlation Between First-Year Seminar Courses and Student Veteran Retention

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About Me:

I was a Student-Veteran who took an FYS Course



Grew up in a Military Family



Joined the Army and then the National Guard



Began attending College



Deployed to Al-Ambar Province Ramadi Iraq 2005-2007



Graduated with my Bachelors Degree

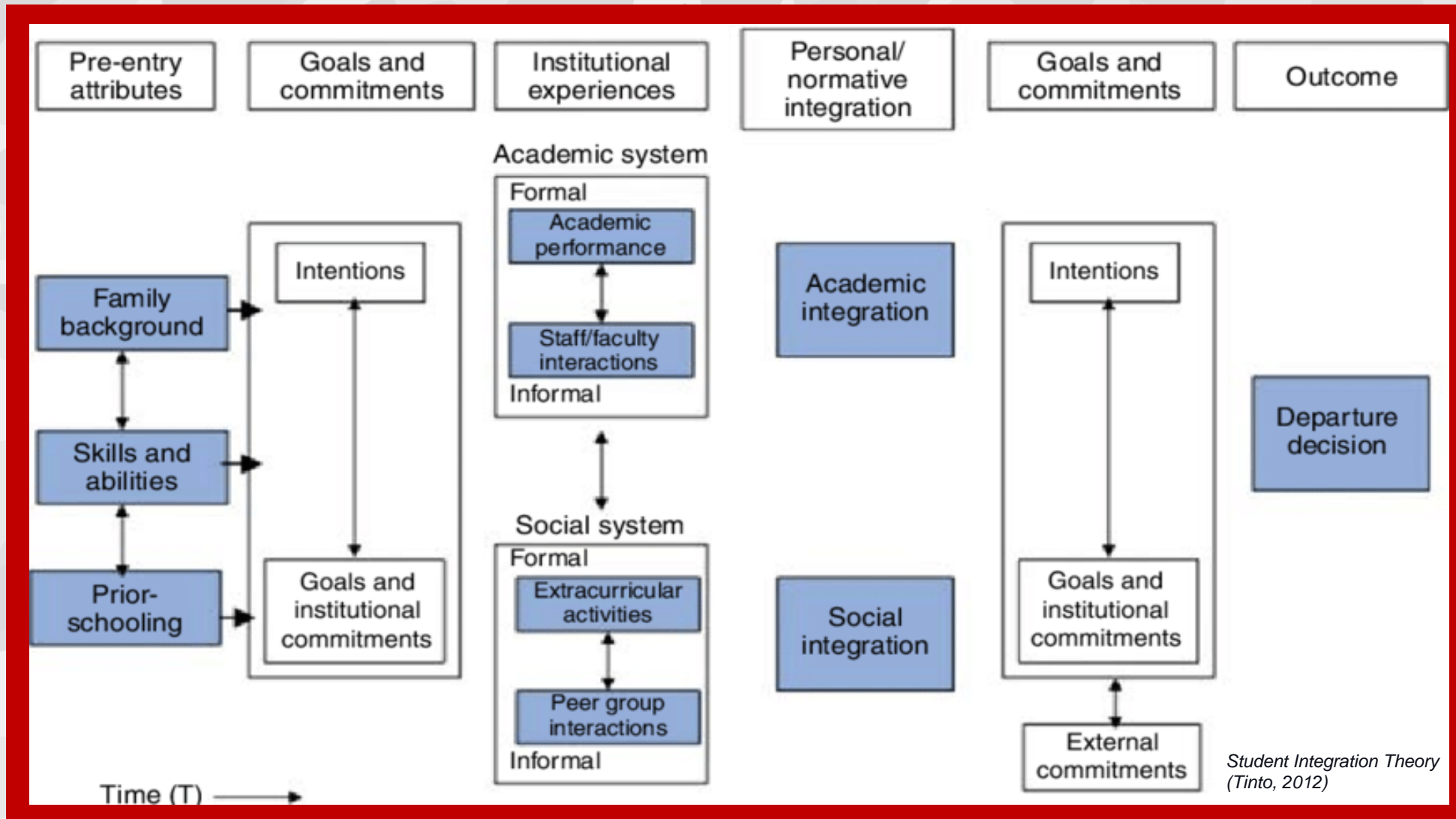


Began working in Higher Education
Got married
Left the Military
Finished Masters Degree
Had Kids



Earned my Doctorate and serve as an Advocate and Problem Solver for the Military-Connected Student Community

This research takes inspiration from Tinto's Student Integration theory showing a clear connection between a student's first exposure to their college curriculum and persistence.



Student Integration Theory
(Tinto, 2012)

Purpose of the Study

- Student persistence/retention is a top priority among higher education leaders (Norman et al., 2015).
- Student veterans are enrolling at higher education institutions at increasing rates (Sportsman & Thomas, 2015).
- Student veterans are considered an at-risk underrepresented student population (Sportsman & Thomas, 2015).
- Little research exists on the impact of FYS Courses on student veteran retention.
- Identification of FYS Courses assisting to limit student veteran attrition may benefit all stakeholders.

First-Year Seminar (FYS):

An early intervention method implementing post-secondary level education courses or seminars to assist new students' acclimation to the higher education environment. Most often, the purpose of the course aims to retain students beyond their first year. While the content and design of FYS courses vary between institutions, most often, the course's purpose is to assist students with their transition into a higher education institution. (Zerr & Bjerke, 2015).



- **FIRST-YEAR PROGRAMS**
- **INTRO TO COLLEGE LIFE**
- **FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE**
- **COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY 101**
- **GATEWAY PROGRAM SEMINAR**
- **& MANY MANY MORE SYNONYMS**

Definitions

- **Correlation:** A connection or relationship mutually connecting variables. This study seeks to identify a connection or relationship between student veteran retention and FYS course participation (Hauck et al., 2020).
- **Enrollment:** Registering for and agreeing to participate in courses offered by a higher education institution. This study enrollment refers to enrollment as students registered at the selected institution and participating in an FYS course (Tinto, 2012).
- **Retention:** The number or percentage of new students who returned to the university for a second consecutive year (Brock, 2014).
- **Student Veteran:** Any student enrolled at a higher education institution that currently or formerly served in the United States Armed Forces, including Active Duty, National Guard, or Reserves (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008).

Methodology

- Ensuring scientific realism, this study utilizes a causal-comparative quantitative research design with an emphasis on a positivist research paradigm.
- Quantitative research seeks to examine the relationship among identified variables, and causal-comparative research investigates whether a relationship exists or not (Khaldi 2017).
- A positivist paradigm approaches research from the perspective that data observation occurs in a neutral, unbiased manner (Khaldi, 2017).
- This study sought to identify if a cause-and-effect relationship exists, observing secondary data which lends to the use of this paradigm.

Participants

This study observed the student veteran population of a large Tier-1 research institution in the South-Central United States between the fall 2019 and spring 2021 semesters.

- **4471** unique student veterans were identified within the two-year data set.
- **292** Unique Student Veterans Took FYS Course
- **33** Unique Student Veterans Took Veteran Exclusive FYS Course
 - **Gender** = 33% Female, 67% Male
 - **Ethnicity** = 42% White, 26% Hispanic/Latino, 20% Black/African American, 12% all other ethnicities
 - **Age range** = 18-78 years old
 - **Average age** = 33 years old
- The institution reports an annual enrollment of over 41,000 students,
 - Veterans comprise approximately 6% of the total annual population.
- The institution indicates enrolling one of the largest student veteran populations in the South-Central region of the United States, which provided a sizeable number of subjects consisting of a representative sample.

Avg Campus Undergraduate 1yr Retention Rate				
Fall 19 Undergraduate Campus Retention				60%
Spring 20 Undergraduate Campus Retention				69%
Fall 20 Undergraduate Campus Retention				55%
Spring 21 Undergraduate Campus Retention				64%
Spring 21 Undergraduate Campus Retention				52%
Fall 19 – Spring 21	Entire Sample	Non-FYS Veterans	All FYS Veterans	Veteran FYS
Total Sample #	4471	4179	292	33
Percent Retained	59%	59%	66%	61%
Percent not Retained	41%	41%	34%	39%
Fall 2019 Sample	1534	1418	116	13
Fall 19 1yr Retention	64%	64%	71%	38%
Spring 2020 Sample	807	758	49	6
Spring 20 1yr Retent	58%	58%	59%	67%
Fall 2020 Sample	1331	1253	78	8
Fall 20 1yr Retention	60%	59%	67%	75%
Spring 2021 Sample	799	750	49	6
Spring 21 1yr Retent	52%	51%	63%	83%
Female	2912	66%	53%	64%
Male	1559	34%	47%	36%
Average Age	31	32	27	26
Average Age Male	30	30	28	26
Average Age Female	32	33	25	26
Amer Ind/Alas Nat	1%	1%	1%	3%
Asian	4%	4%	4%	3%
Black/African Amer	20%	20%	20%	24%
Hispanic Latino	27%	26%	28%	26%
Multiple Ethnicities	6%	6%	11%	15%
Native Hawa/Paci Isl	0%	0%	0%	0%
Not Specified	1%	1%	0%	0%
White	41%	42%	36%	33%

Research Questions

1. Does participation in a First-Year Seminar course at a large Tier-One research institution in the South-Central United States influence student veteran retention?
2. Is there a significant difference in retention rates between student veterans who participate in a veteran-exclusive First-Year Seminar course compared to those who participate in the same course where veterans and non-veterans are combined?
3. Is there a significant difference between the retention rates of student veterans who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and those who do not?

Findings

- **Research Question One:** The study implemented regression analysis through a simple binary model showing a statistically significant result ($r[4457] = 0.1, p < .001$)
- **Research Question Two:** The study utilized Chi-square analysis showing no significant association $X^2 (1, n = 292) = 0.567, p = 0.45$
- **Research Question Three:** The study utilized Chi-square analysis showing statistical significance $X^2 (1, N = 4471) = 6.33, p = 0.01$

Simplified Findings

1. Does participation in a First-Year Seminar course at a large Tier-One research institution in the South-Central United States influence student veteran retention? **YES**
2. Is there a significant difference in retention rates between student veterans who participate in a veteran-exclusive First-Year Seminar course compared to those who participate in the same course where veterans and non-veterans are combined? **NO**
3. Is there a significant difference between the retention rates of student veterans who participate in a First-Year Seminar course and those who do not? **YES**

Additional Findings

The sample data produced several supplementary findings relevant to the study.

- Regression analysis ($r[4465] = 0.36, p < .001$) indicated that **a student veteran's age contributed to participation in an FYS course, retention, and overall GPA.**
- Regression analysis ($r[4465] = 0.36, p = .164$) showed **no significant difference between males and females in the sample.**
- Regression analysis ($r[4457] = 0.1, p = .46$) showed **no significant correlation existed between ethnicity and student veteran retention.**

This supplementary data added depth to the research showing that while age and GPA showed statistical significance in the impact of student veteran retention, a student veteran's ethnicity and gender did not.

The results show that those who took any version of an FYS Course at the observed university have an approximate **8.1 percentage point higher probability of retention** than those who did not take an FYS Course in their first year at the observed university.

Limitations of the Study

- **The observed institution did not formally implement FYS courses until the fall 2018 semester.**
 - Short research window.
- **The study only observed a single institution**
 - May not be representative of similar populations at institutions in other areas of the country.
- **The study only looked at quantitative data**
 - Provided a clear indication as to whether the institution retained a student veteran or not.
 - Provides minimal context as to whether the observed students experienced external motivators resulting in their dropout decision.

Implications

- FYS courses positively impact student veteran retention.
- Showed a clear connection between a student's first exposure to their college curriculum and persistence aligning with Tinto's integration and student departure theories.
- May persuade higher education leaders to further implement FYS courses as a best practice in student veteran retention.
- Future studies could expand upon or duplicate this study's research to observe other nontraditional, at-risk, or underrepresented student populations.
- Further research may allow higher education leaders to identify additional best practices in the early intervention of at-risk, nontraditional student attrition.

- **Veteran enrollment is increasing across the nation.**
 - Experts expect to see a steady increase for the next two decades.



- **56% estimated national college completion rate.**
 - Potentially lower for nontraditional, at-risk populations like veterans.



- **Schools allocate countless resources to reduce attrition.**



- **Resources like FYS courses promote academic and social integration.**

- May lead to increased retention rates among all student populations.



Resistance

Student Veteran

- Time
- Extra Course Work
- Typically, Adult Learners
- Extensive Life Experiences
- G.I. Bill/VA Education Benefits
- Previously attended other colleges
- Does not directly align with degree path

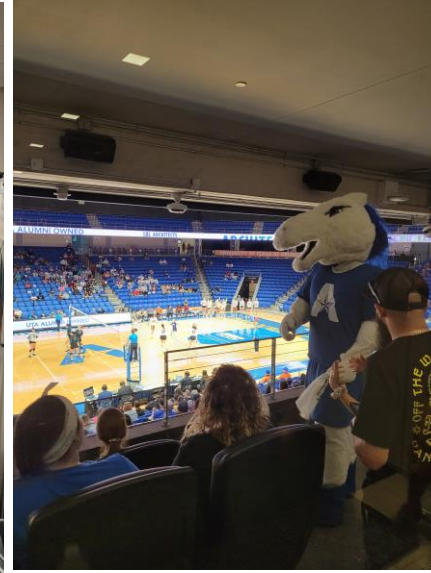
Institutional

- Cost
- Data
- Space
- Curriculum
- Faculty/Staff
- Program Alignment
- Student Resistance

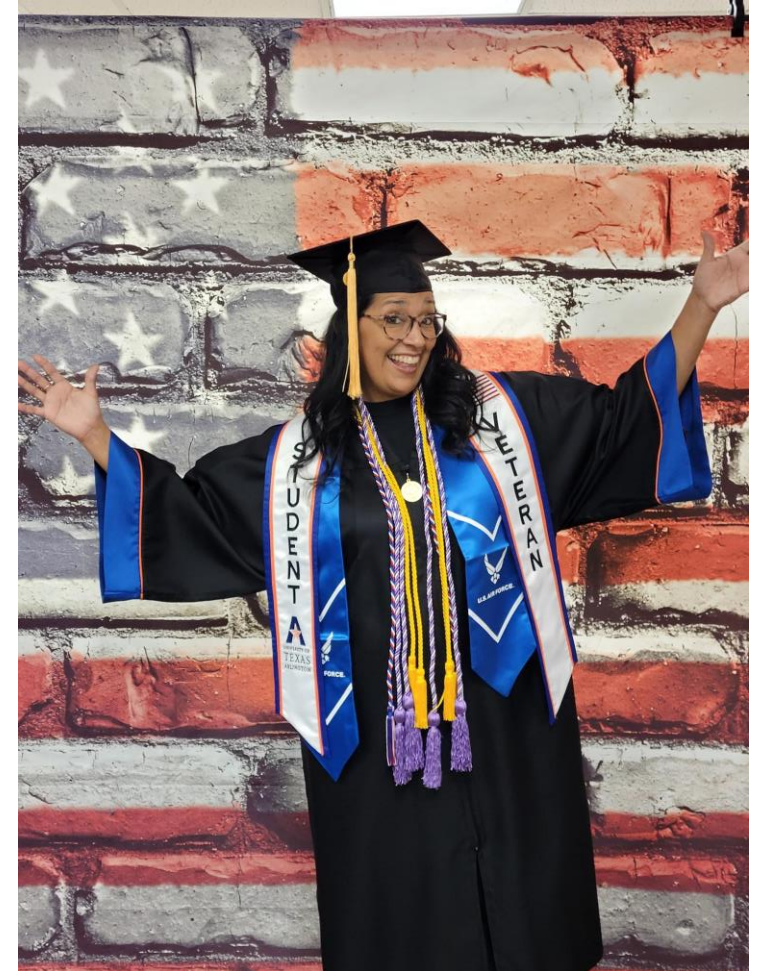
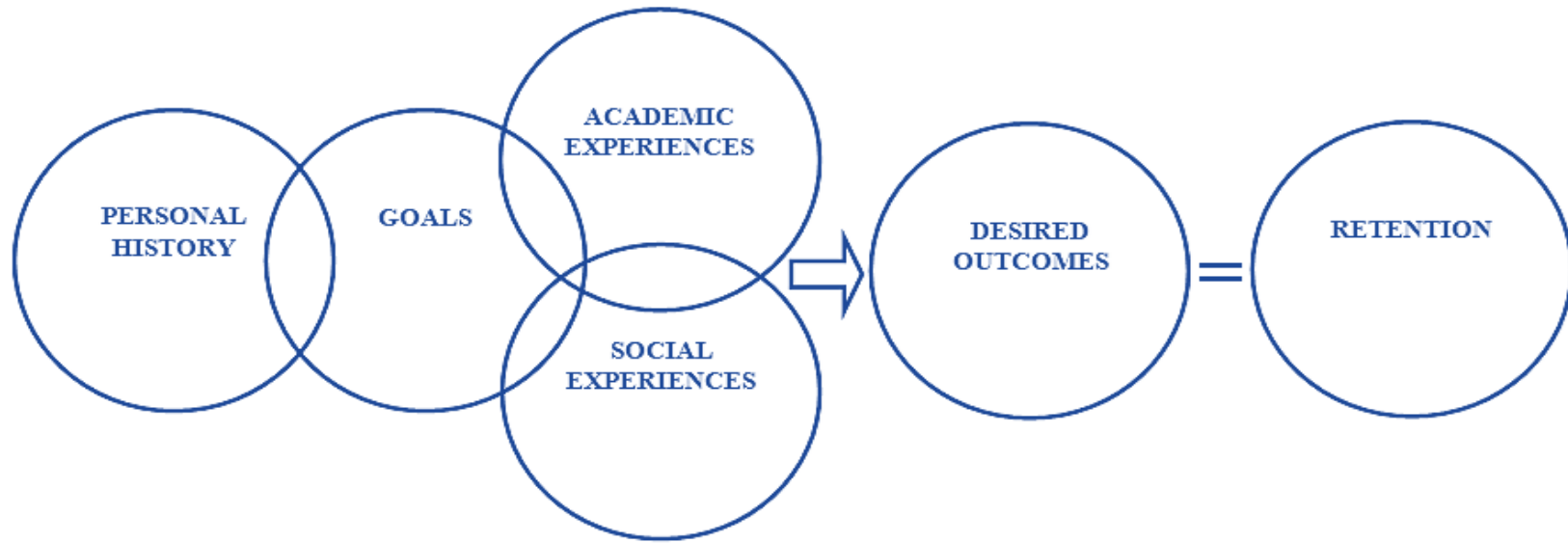


Benefits of FYS Courses

- **Social Integration**
 - Friendships
 - Involvement/Engagement
 - Sense of belonging
- **Institutional Integration**
 - Resource Identification
 - Support Services
 - Faculty/Staff Rapport
- **Intellectual Development**
 - Grade Performance
 - Fundamental Development
 - Degree Planning/Mapping



FYS Courses Promote



Because student veterans vary significantly in demographics, experiences, and needs, making them an incredibly unique population, no single early intervention practice can meet their transition, academic, and social integration needs. However, an FYS course may be a great start.

(Kumm, 2022)

Questions???



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